



**Written Public Hearing Testimony of
Sharon Palmer, Commissioner
Department of Labor
Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee
March 4, 2014**

Good Afternoon Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky, Senator Fonfara, Representative Carpino and members of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with written testimony regarding **House Bill No. 5377: AA Implementing the Recommendations of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee on the Reemployment of Older Workers as They Relate to the Labor Department.** My name is Sharon Palmer and I am the Labor Commissioner.

The bill is problematic for several reasons. First, it tasks the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission (CETC) and the Department of Labor with adding the "reemployment of older workers" to their annual planning of employment and training programs, but fails to define "older worker" or provide any guidance in this regard. The bill further includes, in regard to the "reemployment of older workers," coordinating an electronic state hiring campaign via the Department's website and submitting a report on such, and developing an annual informational campaign to be distributed to the state's Job Centers that includes certain information about the agency's apprenticeship program. Our workforce data supports the need for hiring both older and younger workers and to single out a certain undefined age group runs counter to the need to service all age populations. Moreover, neither CETC nor the Department of Labor has been funded to conduct the electronic state hiring campaign or informational campaign and produce a report by January 1, 2015. The agencies would be unable to accomplish these tasks without additional funding and staff. The bill also lacks clarity regarding exactly what these campaigns would entail.

The bill also seeks to require the Department of Labor to provide to its customers, through the job centers, access to on-line learning courses that are available to unemployed individuals. Endorsing on-line learning programs requires significant

review, particularly with regard to costs and benefits to the customers, and is not something the Department could do without thorough vetting in conjunction with our colleagues in education.

Finally, the bill seeks to amend the states' STEP-UP program. In order to continue bonding for this program, the bill's language would need to be amended to clarify that the bonding monies are to be used in fiscal years 2014 and 2015. I am fully supportive of continuing the STEP-UP program as it has provided employment opportunities that would ordinarily not be available without the state's assistance. However, I oppose the bill's attempt to dilute the program by broadening the pool of available applicants to all Connecticut residents instead of concentrating on those in the high-unemployment urban areas. There is a finite amount of funding available for this program and not restricting the geographical areas will render the intent of the original legislation meaningless.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony today.